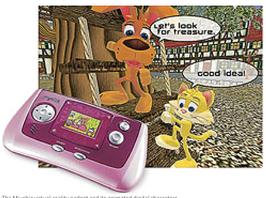
archive.today
webpage capture
Saved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB115490389274028228 search
31 Dec 2023 02:42:03 UTC
All snapshots from host www.wsj.com
no other snapshots from this url
Webpage Screenshot
share download .zip report bug or abuse buy me a coffee

News From Toyland: Gadgets That Chat

By Christina Binkley
Aug. 7, 2006 12:01 am ET

In the toy industry's latest bid to embrace the electronic devices that are distracting kids from traditional playthings, MGA Entertainment Inc. is about to make a major new foray into technology with the launch of a virtual-reality gadget called Miuchiz.

MGA vaulted to stardom in the toy world with its Bratz fashion dolls, big-headed girls in heavy makeup who were launched in 2001 and have since sent Barbie into a tizzy by eating away at her sales.



The Miuchiz virtual-reality gadget and its animated digital characters

Miuchiz (pronounced myoo-cheez) involves a universe of animated digital characters that kids interact with via a BlackBerry-size hand-held device and a Web site. Kids can play solo, earning points for things like food and clothes for their characters. Or they can play in tandem with other hand-helds using infrared beams. The devices can also be hooked into a computer via a USB port, enabling kids to join with others on a giant virtual playdate on the Planet Mion. Each Miuchiz device represents a character from one of three "tribez" -- Monsterz, Babyz or Pawz -- which are designed to appeal respectively to boys, girls and both.

The gadgets are shipping into stores now, where they will sell for a suggested $29.99, including a subscription to the Web site for up to one year. Web site renewals will cost about $25 a year, MGA estimates.

MGA has $20 million invested in the development and marketing of the Miuchiz device, one of four interactive toys the company is set to roll out in the next three months. The new toys form the basis of a whole new electronic business segment for the Van Nuys, Calif., company.

In October, MGA plans to launch a wireless text-messaging device, the Wi-Fi Instant Messenger, priced at a suggested $89.99. Users who have an instant-messaging account can use the device in any Wi-fi hot spot, from Starbucks to a home wireless system, to send messages to other instant-message accounts. MGA hopes parents will snap it up to get their kids to stop hogging the household computer to "text" their friends. Also in October, MGA plans to launch a text-messaging Text & Call Walkie-Talkie set, priced at $49.99, and a tween-oriented digital videocamera with a suggested price of $79.99. The new electronic toys are expected to sell under MGA brand names, including Bratz and Fuse Box, which aim at girls and boys respectively.

Companies that hit with tech toys can reap riches. Viacom Inc. VIA -0.11% ▼ last year bought closely held Neopets, an online virtual-pet game, for $160 million. Neopets has more than 25 million members around the world, who create and care for imaginary online pets.

MGA Entertainment found stardom in the toy world in 2001 with its Bratz dolls.

MGA's nemesis, Mattel, of El Segundo, Calif., agreed last month to acquire Radica Games Ltd., a Bermuda-based marketer of electronic games for $230 million in cash. Radica, which got its start producing souvenir games for Las Vegas casinos, has a line of blackjack, poker, slots and other hand-held grown-up games. Its electronic toys include Friend Chips, an instant-messaging toy for girls that sells for about $19.99, and Cube World, small plastic cubes with display screens, where animated stick characters hop, dance and move from one cube to the next. A set of two cubes sells for about $24.99.

MGA's tech gambit puts it into more-direct competition with Hasbro Inc., HAS -0.85% ▼ of Pawtucket, R.I., which has been moving into electronic toys with music and video players, cameras and videocameras. Hasbro has been something of an MGA ally, even distributing MGA's toys in Spain and other parts of the world. Isaac Larian, MGA's founder and chief executive, says he plans for electronic lines to represent half of the MGA's revenues within a few years, up from a little more than 10% now.

"I see in two or three years, our company having a whole division just for Miuchiz," says Mr. Larian, who got his start in consumer electronics in the 1980s. "We are getting into high-tech kids toys in a major way."

With so much invested in Miuchiz, a flop could be both costly and embarrassing for MGA. To avoid that, the company is planning a barrage of television advertising. It also has some guerilla-marketing plans, including handing out Miuchiz devices to celebrities at a promotional lounge during the MTV Video Music Awards in New York at the end of this month. MGA won't be formally affiliated with MTV event.

Miuchi is the Japanese word for a circle of friends and relatives. The Planet Mion Web site is intended to be populated by thousands of Miuchiz owners, who will befriend, battle, explore and chat with one another. The Web site, which offers varying levels of parental control and will be selectively policed by MGA, goes live on Aug. 15.

Mr. Larian says he is out hiring dozens of game developers, Web designers and other technicians to keep expanding and developing Planet Mion, as well as to develop new tech games and toys. Miuchiz is "changing some of the economics of the toy industry. Now you've got a Web site," says Chris Byrne, an independent toy analyst who has seen a Miuchiz prototype. "It's calling on the toy industry to evolve."

"The thing about Miuchiz that I like is its ability to create communities," Mr. Byrne adds. "It's impossible to predict a hit, but I think they have a really good shot."

Write to Christina Binkley at christina.binkley@wsj.com

MOST POPULAR NEWS

MOST POPULAR OPINION

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

1. House Condemns Campus Antisemitism Testimony of University Presidents
2. WSJ Opinion: Colorado's Trump Disqualification and the Supreme Court
3. Watch: Massive Waves Batter California Coast
4. WSJ Opinion: The Year U.S. Colleges Went Off the Rails
5. WSJ Opinion: The Pandemic Killed Biden's Presidency

SPONSORED OFFERS

SHEIN: SHEIN Discount Code: Get 20% off on orders of $169+
ULTA BEAUTY: Ulta Coupon: Get 20% Off your first purchase
NIKE: Save up to 40% on new sale items + free delivery
KITCHENAID: KitchenAid: Up to $130 Off Artisan Series Tilt-Head Stand Mixer
DOORDASH: 50% Off + free delivery on any order With DoorDash promo code
JCPENNEY: Get 25% Off your Online Purchases w/ JCPenney Coupon Code

BACK TO TOP ^

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. English Edition ▾
a Dow Jones company

WSJ Membership: Buy Side Exclusives, Subscription Options, Why Subscribe?, Corporate Subscriptions, WSJ Higher Education Program, WSJ High School Program, Public Library Program, WSJ Live, Commercial Partnerships
Customer Service: Customer Center, Contact Us, Cancel My Subscription
Tools & Features: Newsletters & Alerts, Guides, Topics, My News, RSS Feeds, Video Center, Watchlist, Podcasts, Visual Stories
Advertise: Commercial Real Estate Ads, Place a Classified Ad, Sell Your Business, Sell Your Home, Recruitment & Career Ads, Coupons, Digital Self Service
More: About Us, Content Partnerships, Corrections, Jobs at WSJ, News Archive, Register for Free, Reprints & Licensing, Buy Issues, WSJ Shop

Dow Jones Products: Barron's BigCharts Dow Jones Newswires Factiva Financial News Mansion Global MarketWatch Risk & Compliance
Buy Side from WSJ WSJ.Pro WSJ.Video WSJ.Wine

Privacy Notice Cookie Notice Manage Cookies Copyright Policy Data Policy Subscriber Agreement & Terms of Use Your Ad Choices Accessibility

Copyright ©2023 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.